



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

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### **Everybody counts - Census includes the homeless**

National Homeless Person's Week starts today and will run until 6 August. It is an important time to focus attention on the needs of homeless people. But of course their needs don't stop once the week ends.

One very important activity which gives us an indication of the extent of homelessness in Australia is the National Census of Population and Housing. The Census will be held on 8 August - only two days after National Homeless Person's Week ends.

The Census aims to count everyone in Australia. The homeless are part of our community and need to be counted in the Census. Data about the homeless is very important when forming policy, allocating resources and providing services.

There are always difficulties in counting a population such as the homeless, but the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which conducts the Census, takes its responsibilities in this area very seriously.

The head of Census Paul Williams said, "The ABS is recognised internationally as having one of the best procedures for counting the homeless in a Census. The ABS has always endeavoured to count the homeless in the Census, but since 1996 the ABS has instituted a range of special procedures to count them. The ABS has continued to refine and improve those procedures.

"A range of organisations dealing with the homeless have been consulted about strategies, procedures and promotional activities to be used for counting the homeless in the Census. We will do our very best to get an accurate count of the homeless."

The ABS strategy recognises and addresses social and cultural barriers to counting the homeless population. The strategy emphasises Census awareness activities aimed at encouraging homeless people to participate in the Census. The ABS has also developed strategies appropriate for counting the Indigenous homeless population.

There are two groups of people whose housing, or lack of, poses particular difficulties for collecting Census data. The first group are people who do not have a conventional "roof" over their heads and who live in places such as on the streets, in parks, under bridges or in squats.

The second group comprises people without a usual address, who are staying temporarily in accommodation such as boarding houses, refuges, hostels, hotel/motels, caravan parks or in the homes of relatives or friends.

In the lead up to the 2006 Census, ABS staff from state and territory offices will contact groups

providing services for the homeless to identify sites where homeless people are likely to be located. People who work with the homeless, and even homeless people themselves, will be recruited and trained by the ABS to be interviewers. Interviewers use a shortened version of the Census form to record details from individuals.

It is important that all people who do not have a usual address on Census night write "NONE" for the question "Where does the person usually live?" on their Census form, regardless of where they are staying on that night.

The homeless population, like all people counted in the Census, can be confident their information will remain confidential.

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